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Three non-zero solutions for a nonlinear eigenvalue problem

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ABSTRACT

In the present paper we prove a novel multiplicity result for a model quasilinear Dirichlet problem (P_λ) depending on a positive parameter λ . By a variational method, we prove that for every $\lambda > 1$ problem (P_λ) has at least two non-zero solutions, while there exists $\hat{\lambda} > 1$ such that problem $(P_{\hat{\lambda}})$ has at least three non-zero solutions.

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1. Introduction

In the present paper we deal with the problem of multiplicity results for the following quasilinear equation coupled with the Dirichlet boundary condition

$$\begin{cases} -\Delta_p u = \lambda \alpha(x) f(u) & \text{in } \Omega, \\ u = 0 & \text{on } \partial\Omega, \end{cases} \quad (P_\lambda)$$

where Ω is a bounded open connected set in \mathbb{R}^n with smooth boundary $\partial\Omega$, $p > n$, Δ_p is the p -Laplacian operator, λ is a positive parameter, $\alpha \in L^1(\Omega)$ is a non-zero potential, and $f : [0, +\infty[\rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ is a continuous function with $f(0) = 0$.

Problems of the type (P_λ) have been the object of intensive investigations in the recent years, see [1–8], and references therein. Many of the aforementioned contributions guarantee the existence of *at least two* non-trivial weak solutions of (P_λ) for $\lambda > 0$ large enough where the key geometric assumptions on the nonlinear term F , where $F : [0, +\infty[\rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ is the primitive of f , that is $F(s) = \int_0^s f(t)dt$ for every $s \geq 0$, can be summarized as

$$\begin{cases} \sup_{[0, +\infty[} F > 0; \\ \limsup_{s \rightarrow 0^+} \frac{F(s)}{s^p} \leq 0 \quad \text{and} \quad \limsup_{s \rightarrow +\infty} \frac{F(s)}{s^p} \leq 0. \end{cases} \quad (1.1)$$

In order to obtain the aforementioned multiplicity results, various variational approaches are exploited; for instance, Morse theory [5,6], the mountain pass theorem and Ricceri-type three critical points results [1–4,7,9].

Notice that under (1.1) one can have even an exact multiplicity result for (P_λ) . To see this, let $p = 2$, $n = 1$, $\Omega = I \subset \mathbb{R}$ be a large interval, $\alpha = 1$, and $f : [0, +\infty[\rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ defined by $f(s) = s(s-a)(1-s)_+$ with $0 < a < 1/2$; here, $t_+ = \max(0, t)$. It is clear that F verifies (1.1). Moreover, via a bifurcation argument, Wei [10] proved that there exists $\lambda_0 > 0$ such that for

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all $0 < \lambda < \lambda_0$ problem (P_λ) has no positive solution, it has exactly one positive solution for $\lambda = \lambda_0$, and *exactly two* positive solutions for $\lambda > \lambda_0$; see also [11].

The main purpose of the present paper is to guarantee the existence of *at least three* non-zero, non-negative weak solutions for (P_λ) for certain values of $\lambda > 0$ when (1.1) holds. According to the above exact multiplicity result, our aim requires more specific assumptions both on f (or F) and α . In order to state our main result, we introduce the notation

$$k_\infty := \frac{n^{-\frac{1}{p}}}{\sqrt{\pi}} \left[\Gamma \left(1 + \frac{n}{2} \right) \right]^{\frac{1}{n}} \left(\frac{p-1}{p-n} \right)^{1-\frac{1}{p}} m(\Omega)^{\frac{1}{n}-\frac{1}{p}}, \quad (1.2)$$

where Γ denotes the Euler Gamma-function.

Our main result reads as follows:

Theorem 1.1. *Let $p > n$, $\alpha \in L^1(\Omega)$ be a non-negative, non-zero function with compact support K . Assume that*

(i) $S_F := \sup_{[0, +\infty[} F < +\infty$;

(ii) $\limsup_{s \rightarrow 0^+} \frac{F(s)}{s^p} \leq 0$.

Moreover, there exists $c > 0$ such that

(iii) $F(c) = \max_{[0, k_\infty(pS_F \|\alpha\|_{L^1})^{\frac{1}{p}}]} F < S_F$;

(iv) $\frac{F(c)}{c^p} > \frac{m(\Omega \setminus K)}{p \text{dist}(K, \partial\Omega)^p \|\alpha\|_{L^1}}$.

Then, the following statements hold:

(a) For every $\lambda > 1$, problem (P_λ) has at least two non-zero, non-negative weak solutions.

(b) There exists $\hat{\lambda} > 1$ such that problem $(P_{\hat{\lambda}})$ has at least three non-zero, non-negative weak solutions.

Before proving Theorem 1.1 some remarks are in order.

Remark 1.1. (a) Under the assumptions of Theorem 1.1, one can prove the existence of two non-zero weak solutions for (P_λ) for enough large values of $\lambda > 0$; the first one is the global minimum of the energy functional associated with (P_λ) with negative energy-level, while the second one is a mountain-pass type solution with positive energy-level. A much precise conclusion can be deduced as follows. Since (i),(ii) and (iv) imply (1.1), a suitable choice in [9] guarantees the existence of at least two non-zero weak solutions for (P_λ) for every $\lambda > \lambda_0$, where

$$\lambda_0 = \inf \left\{ \frac{\int_\Omega |\nabla u|^p}{p \int_K \alpha(x) F(u(x)) dx} : u \in W_0^{1,p}(\Omega), \int_K \alpha(x) F(u(x)) dx > 0 \right\}. \quad (1.3)$$

A simple estimate by means of a suitable truncation function and assumption (iv) show that

$$\lambda_0 < \frac{c^p m(\Omega \setminus K)}{p F(c) \text{dist}(K, \partial\Omega)^p \|\alpha\|_{L^1}} < 1,$$

which concludes the proof of (a) in Theorem 1.1; for details see (3.6). Even more, under these assumptions, Ricceri's result (see [9]) provides a *stability* of problem (P_λ) with respect to any small nonlinear perturbation whenever $\lambda > \lambda_0$. However, for $\lambda > 0$ *small* enough, problem (P_λ) has usually only the trivial solution. Example 3.1 supports this fact as well.

(b) Assumption (iii) requires that the function F has a local maximum $c > 0$ on a quite large set whose size depends on the function F itself, namely, on the interval $I_F := [0, k_\infty(pS_F \|\alpha\|_{L^1})^{\frac{1}{p}}]$. Note that a simple estimate together with hypothesis (iv) shows that c belongs to the interval I_F . In view of the above discussion, the technical assumption (iii) is behind on the existence of a third non-zero weak solution for (P_λ) .

Remark 1.2. Note that in Theorem 1.1 we are able to prove the existence of a single value of $\hat{\lambda} > 1$ such that problem $(P_{\hat{\lambda}})$ has at least three non-zero, non-negative weak solutions. A challenging problem is to know if this phenomenon is stable/unstable with respect to the parameter λ ; namely, to confirm/infirm the existence of certain functions f satisfying all the assumptions of Theorem 1.1 such that problem (P_λ) has exactly two non-zero weak solutions for $\lambda \in]1, +\infty[\setminus \{\hat{\lambda}\}$ and at least three solutions for $\lambda = \hat{\lambda}$.

Remark 1.3. Taking into account the special character of the function α (i.e., α has a compact support K in Ω), we could expect to construct in a trivial way some weak solutions for (P_λ) via p -harmonic functions. The reason is the following; for simplicity, let us consider the case when $\Omega = B(0, R)$ and $K = \bar{B}(0, r)$ for some $0 < r < R$. Due to (iii), the nonlinearity f attains the zero value at least in two points (c being one of them since it is a local maximum for F). Let us denote such an element by $c > 0$. A simple calculation shows that the function $\tilde{u}_c \in W_0^{1,p}(B(0, R))$ defined by

$$\tilde{u}_c(x) = \begin{cases} c & \text{if } x \in K = \bar{B}(0, r), \\ c \frac{|x|^{\frac{p-n}{p-1}} - R^{\frac{p-n}{p-1}}}{r^{\frac{p-n}{p-1}} - R^{\frac{p-n}{p-1}}} & \text{if } x \in B(0, R) \setminus K, \end{cases}$$

verifies almost everywhere problem (P_λ) for every $\lambda \in \mathbb{R}$. Thus, one can construct in a direct way two *almost pointwise* solutions of (P_λ) for every $\lambda \in \mathbb{R}$. However, it is worth noticing that \tilde{u}_c is *not* a weak solution for (P_λ) . Indeed, according to a standard regularity result (see for instance Lieberman [12, Theorem 1]), a bounded weak solution of (P_λ) is a function of class $C^{1,\beta}$ for some $\beta > 0$ which is not our case. Note that without α having compact support K in Ω we are not able to state a similar multiplicity result as Theorem 1.1; we postpone this discussion after giving the whole proof (see Remark 3.1).

Remark 1.4. We are able to state a similar result also in the case when $S_F := \sup_{[0,+\infty[} F = +\infty$. Note that in this case the assumptions/proof are more involved, see Theorem 3.1.

We conclude this section with a simple consequence of Theorem 1.1 when we are dealing with a highly quasilinear problem, i.e., the value of p in the p -Laplacian is large enough. Namely, we have

Corollary 1.1. Let $\alpha \in L^1(\Omega)$ be a non-negative, non-zero function with compact support K , and besides of (i) from Theorem 1.1, we assume that 0 is a local maximum of F , and that there exist constants c, δ , with $0 < c < k_\infty < \delta$ and $c \leq \text{dist}(K, \partial\Omega)$ such that $0 < F(c) = \max_{[0,\delta]} F < S_F$. Then, there exists $p_0 > n$ such that for each $p \geq p_0$, both conclusions of Theorem 1.1 hold.

The proof of Corollary 1.1 is based on the observations that $\lim_{p \rightarrow \infty} (p S_F \|\alpha\|_{L^1})^{\frac{1}{p}} = 1$ and $\lim_{p \rightarrow \infty} (c/\text{dist}(K, \partial\Omega))^p/p = 0$; these limits are used to prove items (iii) and (iv) from Theorem 1.1, respectively.

2. Preliminaries

Our main tool is the following theorem by Ricceri which is a consequence of a more general result [13, Theorem 1]:

Theorem 2.1. Let $(X, \|\cdot\|)$ be a reflexive real Banach space, $p > 1$, $J : X \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ a C^1 functional, with compact derivative such that $J(0) = 0$ and

$$\max \left\{ \limsup_{u \rightarrow 0} \frac{J(u)}{\|u\|^p}, \limsup_{\|u\| \rightarrow \infty} \frac{J(u)}{\|u\|^p} \right\} \leq 0.$$

Moreover, assume that there exist $\gamma > 0$, $\rho \in \mathbb{R}$, $v \in [0, \frac{1}{p}[$, $u_1 \in X \setminus \{0\}$, $u_2 \in X$ such that

- (j) $J(u) \leq \gamma + v\|u\|^p$ for all $u \in X$;
- (jj) $\|u_1\|^p \leq pJ(u_1)$ and $\|u_2\|^p < p(J(u_2) + \rho)$;
- (jjj) $J(u_2) = \sup_{\|u\|^p \leq \frac{p(\rho+\gamma)}{1-pv}} J(u) < \sup_X J$.

Then, there exists $\hat{\lambda} > 1$ such that the functional $\Phi : X \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ defined by

$$\Phi(u) = \frac{1}{p}\|u\|^p - \hat{\lambda}J(u)$$

has at least three non-zero critical points.

Remark 2.1. Notice that, from the assumptions of Theorem 2.1 one has also that 0, being a strict local minimum, belongs to the set of the critical points of Φ . Also, one has that u_2 is a local maximum of J , hence a critical point of J .

In the sequel we will denote by X the space $W_0^{1,p}(\Omega)$ endowed with the usual norm

$$\|u\| = \left(\int_{\Omega} |\nabla u(x)|^p dx \right)^{\frac{1}{p}}.$$

Since $p > n$, the embedding of X into $C^0(\bar{\Omega})$ is continuous and compact. Let c_∞ be the embedding constant, that is

$$c_\infty = \sup_{u \in X \setminus \{0\}} \frac{\max_{\bar{\Omega}} |u|}{\|u\|}.$$

We have the following estimate for c_∞ , see [14]:

$$c_\infty \leq \frac{n^{-\frac{1}{p}}}{\sqrt{\pi}} \left[\Gamma \left(1 + \frac{n}{2} \right) \right]^{\frac{1}{n}} \left(\frac{p-1}{p-n} \right)^{1-\frac{1}{p}} m(\Omega)^{\frac{1}{n}-\frac{1}{p}},$$

where Γ denotes the Euler Gamma-function, and equality occurs when Ω is a ball. From (1.2), we clearly have that $c_\infty \leq k_\infty$.

Recall that by a weak solution of (P_λ) we mean a function $u \in X$ such that

$$\int_{\Omega} |\nabla u|^{p-2} \nabla u \nabla v - \hat{\lambda} \int_{\Omega} \alpha(x) f(u) v = 0,$$

for every $v \in X$. It is well known that critical points of Φ are weak solutions of (P_λ) .

3. Proof of Theorem 1.1

Without loss of generality we can assume that f is defined on the whole real axis, putting $f(s) = 0$ for all $s \leq 0$. If we still denote by F the primitive of f , then $F(s) = 0$ for all $s \leq 0$. Define $J : X \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ by

$$J(u) = \int_{\Omega} \alpha(x) F(u) \quad \text{for all } u \in X.$$

The functional J is of class C^1 , has compact derivative and $J(0) = 0$. Assumption (i) implies that J is bounded and

$$\sup_X J \leq \sup_{[0, +\infty[} F \|\alpha\|_{L^1} = S_F \|\alpha\|_{L^1}. \quad (3.1)$$

In particular,

$$\limsup_{\|u\| \rightarrow \infty} \frac{J(u)}{\|u\|^p} \leq 0. \quad (3.2)$$

Moreover, from (ii) it follows that for fixed $\varepsilon > 0$, there exists $s_0 > 0$ such that $F(s) \leq \varepsilon s^p$ for all $s \in [0, s_0]$ and so, $F(s) \leq \varepsilon |s|^p$ for all $s \in [-s_0, s_0]$. Then, if $u \in X$ and $\|u\| \leq \frac{s_0}{c_\infty}$, one has

$$F(u(x)) \leq \varepsilon |u(x)|^p \quad \text{for every } x \in \Omega.$$

So,

$$J(u) \leq \varepsilon \|\alpha\|_{L^1} \|u\|_\infty^p \leq \varepsilon \|\alpha\|_{L^1} c_\infty^p \|u\|^p,$$

which implies at once

$$\limsup_{u \rightarrow 0} \frac{J(u)}{\|u\|^p} \leq 0. \quad (3.3)$$

We claim to apply Theorem 2.1 to the functional J defined above which, in view of (3.2) and (3.3), verifies

$$\max \left\{ \limsup_{u \rightarrow 0} \frac{J(u)}{\|u\|^p}, \limsup_{\|u\| \rightarrow \infty} \frac{J(u)}{\|u\|^p} \right\} \leq 0.$$

Denote by $\delta = \text{dist}(K, \partial\Omega)$ and define $u_c : \Omega \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ as it follows:

$$u_c(x) = \begin{cases} c & \text{if } \text{dist}(x, K) = 0 \\ c \left(1 - \frac{\text{dist}(x, K)}{\delta} \right) & \text{if } 0 < \text{dist}(x, K) \leq \delta \\ 0 & \text{if } \text{dist}(x, K) > \delta, \end{cases} \quad (3.4)$$

where c is from assumption (iii). Notice that the function $u_c \in X$ is Lipschitzian and $|\nabla u_c(x)| \leq \frac{c}{\delta}$ for almost every $x \in \Omega$. One has that

$$\|u_c\|^p = \int_{\Omega \setminus K} |\nabla u_c|^p \leq \frac{c^p}{\delta^p} m(\Omega \setminus K).$$

Also, since K is the support of the function α , one has

$$J(u_c) = \int_{\Omega} \alpha(x) F(u_c) = F(c) \|\alpha\|_{L^1}, \quad (3.5)$$

and assumption (iv) implies at once that

$$\|u_c\|^p < pJ(u_c). \quad (3.6)$$

From assumption (iii) we have also that u_c is not a global maximum of J . Indeed, if d is a positive number such that $F(d) > F(c)$, then defining u_d as in (3.4), we have that

$$J(u_d) = F(d) \|\alpha\|_{L^1} > F(c) \|\alpha\|_{L^1} = J(u_c). \quad (3.7)$$

It is easily seen that

$$\left\{ u \in X : \|u\| \leq (pS_F \|\alpha\|_{L^1})^{\frac{1}{p}} \right\} \subseteq \left\{ u \in X : \|u\|_\infty \leq k_\infty (pS_F \|\alpha\|_{L^1})^{\frac{1}{p}} \right\}.$$

So, if $u \in X$ and $\|u\| \leq (pS_F \|\alpha\|_{L^1})^{\frac{1}{p}}$, then, due to assumption (iii),

$$J(u) \leq J(u_c),$$

that is, together with the fact that $\|u_c\| \leq (pS_F\|\alpha\|_{L^1})^{\frac{1}{p}}$ (cf. (iv)),

$$J(u_c) = \max_{\bar{B}\left(0, (pS_F\|\alpha\|_{L^1})^{\frac{1}{p}}\right)} J, \quad (3.8)$$

where $\bar{B}(0, \sigma)$ denotes the closed ball in X centered at zero of radius σ .

Assumptions (j)–(jjj) of Theorem 2.1 are immediately verified with the choices $\gamma = S_F\|\alpha\|_{L^1}$, $\rho = \nu = 0$ and $u_1 = u_2 = u_c$. Indeed, condition (j) follows from (3.1) while (jj) is a consequence of (3.6). Finally, (3.7) and (3.8) imply at once (jjj). All the assumptions of Theorem 2.1 are satisfied. Then, there exists $\hat{\lambda} > 1$ such that the functional

$$u \rightarrow \frac{1}{p}\|u\|^p - \hat{\lambda}J(u)$$

has at least three non-zero critical points. As critical points of this functional are non-negative weak solutions of problem $(P_{\hat{\lambda}})$, our conclusion is achieved. \square

Remark 3.1. As we already pointed out in the Introduction, without α having compact support K in Ω we meet several obstacles to apply Theorem 2.1. Indeed, in order to ensure the existence of a non-zero, local (but not global) maximum point $u_2 = u_c$ for J , careful estimates are needed with specific truncation functions in X , see relations (3.5), (3.7) and (3.8); otherwise, the aforementioned expressions will become much involved. Notice that if in (P_{λ}) we have a zero Neumann boundary condition instead of the zero Dirichlet boundary condition, the arguments become much simpler and no restriction is needed on α .

We propose now an example of nonlinearity satisfying the assumptions of Theorem 1.1.

Example 3.1. Let $q > p > n$, $\alpha \in L^1(\Omega)$ be a non-negative function with compact support K satisfying

$$\|\alpha\|_{L^1} > \frac{m(\Omega \setminus K)}{p \operatorname{dist}(K, \partial\Omega)^p} \frac{\pi^{p-1}}{(\sqrt{2})^{q+1}}.$$

Assume also that m is an integer, verifying

$$m > \frac{k_{\infty}}{(2\pi)^{1-\frac{1}{p}}} (p\|\alpha\|_{L^1})^{\frac{1}{p}}.$$

Define $f : [0, +\infty[\rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ by

$$f(s) = \begin{cases} \operatorname{sign}(\pi - s) |\sin s|^{q-1} & \text{if } s \in [0, 2\pi[\\ 2 |\sin s|^{q-1} \chi_{[2m\pi, (2m+1)\pi]}(s) & \text{if } s \in [2\pi, +\infty[\end{cases}$$

where $\chi_{[2m\pi, (2m+1)\pi]}$ is the characteristic function of the interval $[2m\pi, (2m+1)\pi]$.

First, for $\lambda \in]0, c_{\infty}^{-p}\|\alpha\|_{L^1}^{-1}[$, problem (P_{λ}) has only the zero solution. On the other hand, according to Theorem 1.1, for every $\lambda > 1$ problem (P_{λ}) has at least two non-zero weak solutions, and there exists $\hat{\lambda} > 1$ such that problem $(P_{\hat{\lambda}})$ has at least three non-zero, non-negative solutions.

In the previous result and example we treated the case of bounded primitive F . It is also possible to handle the case when F is unbounded under more technical assumptions. We conclude the present paper by stating such a result without giving its explicit proof.

Theorem 3.1. Let $p > n$, $\alpha \in L^{\infty}(\Omega)$ be a non-negative, non-zero function with compact support K . Assume that

- (i) $\sup_{[0, +\infty[} F = +\infty$;
- (ii) $\limsup_{s \rightarrow 0^+} \frac{F(s)}{s^p} \leq 0$; $\limsup_{s \rightarrow +\infty} \frac{F(s)}{s^p} \leq 0$.

Moreover, assume that there exist $\gamma > 0$, $\nu \in [0, \frac{1}{p}[$ and $c > 0$ such that

- (iii) $F(c) = \max_{[0, k_{\infty}(\frac{p\gamma}{1-p\nu})^{\frac{1}{p}}]} F$;
- (iv) $\frac{F(c)}{c^p} > \frac{m(\Omega \setminus K)}{p \operatorname{dist}(K, \partial\Omega)^p \|\alpha\|_{L^1}}$;
- (v) $\|\alpha\|_{L^{\infty}} F(s) - \nu(k_{\infty} m(\Omega))^{-1} s^p \leq \frac{\gamma}{m(\Omega)}$ for all $s \geq 0$.

Then, there exists $\hat{\lambda} > 1$ such that problem $(P_{\hat{\lambda}})$ has at least three non-zero, non-negative solutions.

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